

VZCZCXRO1947
PP RUEHDA
DE RUEHIT #1028/01 3371058
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 031058Z DEC 07 ZFF4
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7712
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 7307
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0048
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA PRIORITY 2323
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7713

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001028

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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BAGHDAD PLEASE PASS ERBIL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OREP](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL ROHRBACHER DISCUSSES KURDISH ISSUES,
OUTREACH, BILATERAL RELATIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On November 26, CODEL Rohrabacher met ARI Movement founder Kemal Koprulu to discuss Kurdish issues in Turkey and Iraq. The Congressman was joined by Congressman Louie Gohmert and former Chairman of the California Republican Party Shawn Steel. Koprulu was accompanied by Rifat Saricaoglu, Acting Vice President of the Board of Trustees at Bilgi University. Koprulu noted that in recent years, the Turkish government, military and people have come to distrust U.S. motives with regard to Northern Iraq and the Kurds, and urged the USG to engage in an enhanced public diplomacy effort to counter widespread conspiracy theories. Congressman Rohrabacher described his ideal scenario where the U.S., Turkey and Kurds in Northern Iraq could unite to combat Iranian influence in the region. End Summary.

Support for a Kurdish State?

¶2. (SBU) Explaining that he likes to challenge conventional ideas with regard to internationally established boundaries, Congressman Rohrabacher asked what percentage of Kurds in Turkey would be in favor of creating an independent Kurdish state. Koprulu noted that Southeast Turkey has poor infrastructure, is economically depressed, and that if Kurds in that region ever voted on such a referendum, they would vote with emotion. Saricaoglu added there are 10-15 million Kurds in Turkey, a number difficult to estimate because of extensive intermarriage.

¶3. (SBU) Koprulu argued individual provinces in southeast Turkey might be in favor of becoming part of a Kurdish state (e.g., Diyarbakir), but the result would not be unanimous. Saricaoglu mentioned Turkey's acceptance of a million Kurdish refugees at various times throughout the 1980s and 90s. The majority of these are now Turkish citizens, grateful for the assistance Turkey provided them. Saricaoglu argued that one possible long-term solution to the Kurdish question would be to allow some provinces in southeast Turkey a greater level of autonomy. Koprulu cautioned the Turkish Government is very apprehensive about the idea of a Kurdish state and said any action would first involve extensive research.

¶4. (SBU) Koprulu noted that during the last five years, senior officials in the Turkish Government viewed the concept of an independent Kurdish state as an idea proposed and supported by the French and German Governments. During the last few years, however senior Turkish Government officials have started to believe the United States and Israeli Governments also support this concept. Rohrabacher noted his belief that if the United States had to choose between supporting Turkey or the Kurds, the United States would side

with Turkey. He explained an ideal situation as one in which the Kurds view both the United States and Turkey as partners/allies and in which the three collectively unite against Iran and Iran's allies in the region.

U.S. - Turkish Relations: Lack of Mutual Trust

15. (SBU) Former Chairman of the California Republican Party Shawn Steel asked about the state of Turkish-Israeli relations. Koprulu responded that like U.S.-Turkish relations, Israeli-Turkish relations had suffered greatly in recent years. In both cases the biggest problem is a serious erosion of mutual trust. Our bilateral mil-mil relationship is seriously damaged, he argued. Many in the Turkish Army believe the U.S. military has played into the hands of PKK, and that the U.S. military supports the establishment of an independent Kurdish state (in Northern Iraq).

16. (SBU) Congressman Gohmert asked why the Turkish Parliament did not let the U.S. move troops through Turkey as part of the invasion of Iraq. Mr. Koprulu offered several reasons including bitter feelings stemming from the First Gulf War, Cyprus, the Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR) and general disapproval of the U.S. Iraq policy, including the invasion. Turkey lost five to eight billion dollars during the first Gulf War due to lost trade and the closure of a major oil pipeline, Koprulu said. After the Gulf War, the United States wrote off large amounts of foreign debt for other allies in the region, but not for Turkey. Many leaders in Turkey feel that as a result, the 1990s were a lost decade for Turkey.

Turkey feels betrayed and attacked by the U.S. on the Armenia issue and feels that the United States gave up on serious

ISTANBUL 00001028 002 OF 002

efforts to resolve the Cyprus situation and ceded this issue to the EU. Congressman Rohrabacher explained he voted for the Armenian Genocide Resolution in the Foreign Relations Committee, but noted he might have considered voting against the resolution had Turkey allowed troops to pass through Turkey in 2003. Finally Koprulu explained that opposition to U.S. Iraq policy pre-dated the invasion. The Turks feel that they were not adequately consulted regarding the 2003 Iraq invasion, and take this as a signal that the United States does not value Turkey or consider it an equal partner on the international stage.

Turkey and the West

17. (SBU) Koprulu explained he is not a fan or an advocate of full EU accession. He cited recent poll data that show the approval rating for the United States is under 10 percent, and that only 30 percent are in favor of joining the EU. The Turkish mindset has shifted from a positive view of the United States to one of strong dislike, skepticism and betrayal. At the same time the Turkish public is suffering from a lack of confidence, and therefore is open to rampant conspiracy theories and a degree of paranoia.

18. (SBU) Congressmen Rohrabacher and Gohmert expressed amazement at the major shift in attitudes toward the U.S. on the part of the Turkish public, and asked how it could be reversed. Koprulu and Saricaoglu said that such an effort would require a massive public diplomacy campaign, featuring education and exchange of ideas with Turkish young people. Many older Turks have already formulated their ideas about the United States. However, Turkey has a very large, young population in the midst of formulating their own opinions and impressions. Additionally, the Turkish higher education system is only able to effectively educate 20 percent of the young people who want to pursue a university education. The United States has a window of opportunity to educate more Turkish young people in the United States, especially at the

graduate level. Turkey truly is t a turning point with respect to whether the population and the government continue to engage and cooperate with the western world or whether the country changes course and begins to look east, Koprulu argued.

¶9. (SBU) Congressman Rohrabacher asked about public diplomacy efforts by the State Department and other senior government officials. Koprulu argued current outreach efforts are insufficient. The U.S. government needs to bring more officials from all levels to Turkey to engage the public on U.S. policy and counteract destructive conspiracy theories, he urged.

¶10. (U) Codel Rohrabacher did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
WIENER